

WASHINGTON, D.C.— Today, Congressman Jim Costa (D-Fresno) commended U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack's announcement today that USDA plans to purchase about 200 million pounds of nonfat dry milk for domestic feeding programs, offering relief to dairy farmers and low income families challenged by tough economic times.

"I am pleased to see this step Secretary Vilsack is taking to ease the hardships dairymen are facing in my district and across the nation," said Costa. "With domestic and global demand for U.S. dairy products declining, combined with producer costs at all-time highs, this is a positive move taken by the Secretary. My colleagues and I look forward to working with him on implementing the Dairy Export Incentive Program (DEIP) and additional steps to fix our nation's dairy industry."

In January, Costa and 35 Members of Congress sent a letter encouraging Secretary Vilsack to use USDA authority to make dairy purchases for feeding programs. The letter expressed concern for dairy farmers who are faced with milk prices 25 percent lower than last year and feed prices 15 percent higher. They also highlighted the fact that a record number of Americans, more than 31 million people, qualified for benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) at the end of 2008. Costa met with Secretary Vilsack in February to discuss the problems plaguing the dairy industry in California.

Details of Secretary Vilsack's announcement can be found here: http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/s.7_0_A/7_0_1OB?contentidonly=true&contentid=2009/03/0071.xml